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Jordan's Press: *Al-Rai* Daily Newspaper as a
Case Study

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Abstract

In light of international changes (the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989) and the Information and Communications Technology revolution that the world has witnessed since the 1980s, the question poses itself: How can media institutions in the Third World, particularly the press, develop and adapt to a new context that requires greater freedom, legislation, and human and material resources? What is the role of the political authorities in this new press and its new role?

Starting from this somewhat general question, this study analyses the development of a *Al-Rai*, a Jordanian daily newspaper, as an example of the Arab press in general, and the Jordanian press in particular. It is the 'newspaper of the authorities' and their semi-official *porte parole*. It is considered as representative of the third generation of Jordanian press, which is based on somewhat large media institutions. Finally, *Al-Rai* is Jordan's leading newspaper in sales and advertising, and in 1999 it was the Arabic newspaper that is most read on the Internet.

The study will analyse the reasons behind the establishment of this newspaper in 1971, its movement from the public to the private sector and back, as well as the tools that the political authorities used to pressure and control it, including closure and appropriation. The study will also review changes in the Jordanian press, (including *Al-Rai*) produced by the process of democratisation at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. These changes included new legislation as well as advances in Information and Communications Technology and their effect on journalists and their professional performance.

Keywords

Jordan, media, freedom of the press, information and communications technology

I. Introduction

Starting in 1989, Jordan, along with many third World and Eastern Bloc countries, witnessed the beginning of a new political era in which political decision makers adopted the choice of democracy or, more accurately, democratic transformation. This resulted in many transformations in different fields, particularly the political field, where the emergence of issues related to human rights and basic freedoms were among the most important of these developments. The freedom to express one's thoughts and opinions, and the freedom of the press to publish, explain and defend these opinions are among the most important indicators of this development.¹

The state in process of democratization became in the spotlight, no longer able to hide its political practices, particularly in the context of the 'global village' where globalization shortened distances, united political regimes around common values on the human being, the open economy and even on questions of good and evil.

It would be difficult to talk about globalization without talking about media institutions and the information revolution. Telecommunications technology, united with the media, emerged to threaten traditional media. Information technology succeeded in reducing the lag necessary for an entire society to have access to the news, after such news had long remained the prerogative of the political and economic elite. Modern telecommunications eliminated traditional barriers and made information accessible to all.² French author Paul Valero states that: 'we now witness the end of geography. Nowhere is isolated, no nation is independent, no culture is immune.'³

Hence the importance of this study in identifying the effects of globalization and its resultant political (democratic) and technological transformations on one of the traditional media in Jordan: the Jordan Press Foundation's *Al-Rai*. *Al-Rai* is considered one of the most important dailies in Jordan, being the semi-official mouthpiece of the Jordanian Government, the best selling daily in Jordan (70,000-90,000 copies sold daily), in addition to having won the Arab Electronic Newspaper Award in 1999, with an average monthly Internet readership of 13 million.⁴ The study gains additional importance from the fact that, since the time of Guttenberg, all forms of freedom of thought have come to pin their hopes on the press, particularly after the emergence of mass media, whose institutions have come to be a reflection and an integral part of the regime.⁵

II. Questions and Assumptions

The fundamental questions that this study seeks to answer are: 'How did the Jordan Press Foundation *Al-Rai* develop in the face of continuous political and technological change?' Was it able to keep pace with these developments does it continue to play its traditional role as a 'tool' used by the authorities to direct public opinion?

In seeking to answer these questions, the study makes the following assumptions:

1. The government has dominated *Al-Rai* since its establishment.
2. The democratic transformation witnessed by Jordan gave a wider margin of freedom to *Al-Rai*.

1 Shalabi, Jamal, 2000. *Democratic Transformation and Freedom of the Press in Jordan*. UAE: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, p. 7.

2 *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 27 April 2000, p. 13.

3 Snow, Mai, 2001. *Communications in the Age of Globalization*. Beirut: Dar Al-Nahda, p. 15.

4 Interview with Nader Al-Hourani, Director General of the Jordan Press Foundation, 1 January 2004.

5 Balle, Francis, 1984. *Médias et Société*. Paris: Monchrestien, p. 189.

3. Privatizing the newspaper, as opposed to leaving it in the hands of the public sector, leads to its greater development.
4. As the information revolution media grow in power, interest in *Al-Rai* as a traditional newspaper decreases.
5. Technological developments had a positive effect on the quality of journalism (in form and substance) of *Al-Rai*.

III. Concepts

Two concepts need to be defined, to enable the study to analyze and understand accurately the effect of globalization on *Al-Rai*: These are *Al-Rai* and globalization.

A. *Al-Rai*

Al-Rai was created by the Jordanian Government in 1971. It is the main product of the Jordan Press Foundation, which also publishes the *Jordan Times*, an English daily founded in 1975, a commercial printing press founded in the same year, *Hatem* (a children's magazine established in 1998), and the *Al-Rai* Centre for Studies and Information that was founded in 1999.⁶ *Al-Rai* is the best selling Jordanian newspaper and the leader in terms of advertising.

Al-Rai belongs to the print press, which was defined by the French media expert Pierre Alber as 'one of the most common products that characterize an industrialized society [...] and its development is one of the most significant indicators of the level of modernization of society in the Third World.'⁷

B. Globalization

The term globalization has many definitions. This study will address the most important ones, which refer to aspects of the political and communications transformation and its effect on the international economy and media.

In his book *The Lexus and Olive Tree*, renowned American journalist Thomas Friedman defines globalization as:

a moving and changing system, goes through a continuous transformation process. This process includes economic integration, the sharp growth of the economy and technology at a stage hard to imagine, to a point that allows companies and individuals to reach the world more quickly, deeply, and inexpensively than before.⁸

American author Edward Herman defines it as 'an active continuous process of cooperation, development and expansion across borders, building a strong base abroad through economic and legal facilities that realize economic and political gains in addition to challenging nationalism (*étatisme*) and concepts of security.'⁹

To avoid belabouring the issue with definitions, this study will only refer to the possible methodological outlooks outlined by Egyptian thinker Sayyed Yassin, which must be taken into consideration when studying globalization:

6 *Jordan Press Foundation 18th Annual Report*, 2003, Amman, Al-Rai Press, p. 13.

7 Alber, Pierre, 1991. *La Presse*. Paris, Coll: Que Sais-je? Presses Universitaires de France, p.3.

8 Shalabi, Jamal, 2001. 'Arab-American Relations in the Age of Globalization,' in: Khasawneh, Sami, (ed), *Arab-American Relations: Towards a Bright Future*. Amman, University of Jordan in cooperation with Young University, USA, p. 536.

9 Ibid.

- a. Globalization as a historic era.
- b. Globalization as manifestations of some economic phenomena.
- c. Globalization as the triumph and consolidation of American values.
- d. Globalization as an expression of the information and communications technology revolution.¹⁰

IV. Methodology

The study will follow a legal-institutional approach, which is one of the oldest methods of research in political science, with many advocates in French Law colleges, particularly in constitutional studies.¹¹ This methodology views the regime as: 'a group of institutions that define the regime and its methods of exercising authority, and the nature of this authority.'¹² Originally, this methodology referred to purely political institutions (parliament, government, judiciary, etc.), but we can use it in studying any institution that has a political dimension, such as the *Al-Rai*, the semi-official mouthpiece of the Government of Jordan and a tool of directing the public opinion.

For the purpose of measuring the level of institutionalization of this component of the Jordanian political regime, the study will use the four standards proposed by American political scientist Samuel Huntington¹³ and apply them to *Al-Rai*, to measure the degree to which they are applicable and actually applied. The standards are:

1. Adaptability. This means the institution's ability to face endogenous and exogenous changes in the environment by changing individuals and the positions.
2. Complexity, meaning that the institution has more than one function and a number of internal units with an adequate level of specialization. Complexity is vital for the continuity of the institution, and to measure it Huntington uses two indicators:
 - a. The number and diversity of the institution's units.
 - b. The number and diversity of the institution's functions.
3. Autonomy refers to the institution's freedom of action. This is measured by:
 - a. The Budget. Does the institution have an independent budget, and can it use the budget at its discretion?
 - b. Staff management. To what extent is the institution independent in utilizing its staff?
4. Coherence, meaning the level of accord amongst members of the institution. This is measured by the following indicators:
 - a. Members' loyalty to the institution.
 - b. The existence of factions within the institution on occasions of a change of leadership.
 - c. The existence of conflict within the institution in general, and whether it revolves to the institution's mission and objectives or to marginal issues.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 536.

¹¹ Ridley, F.F., 1975. *The Study of Government: Political Science and Public Administration*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, p. 44.

¹² Al-Manoufi, Kamal, 1985. *Nathariyat Al-Nuthum Al-Siyasiyah (Theories of Political Regimes)*. Kuwait: Printing Agency, p. 11.

¹³ Huntington, Samuel, 1996. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 23.

Drawing on institutional methodology to answer the above questions, this rest of this paper is divided into two parts: the first addresses the establishment of *Al-Rai* and its development, highlighting the dichotomy between the ‘will of the authorities’ and ‘the will for freedom;’ the second part addresses the impact of globalization in creating a democratic environment and the resultant political, economic and media openness, as well as the impact of technological globalization on *Al-Rai*’s performance and standard.

V. Case Study: *Al-Rai*—Establishment and Development

Historically, the Jordanian press passed through three stages: The press of the Emirate (1921-1946), the press of Kingdom (1946, year of independence-1970), and the modern stage, which itself breaks down into two stages: 1970-1989 when the press in Jordan was characterized by the financial stability and technical progress; and 1989 (the year when the democratization started—till the present).¹⁴

Al-Rai belongs to the third generation of Jordanian newspapers. It started in the seventies of the last century, a stage characterized by the appearance of institutional newspapers (not owned and managed by an individual or a family). In this section we will study and analyze: (1) the reasons for establishing Jordan Press Foundation and *Al-Rai*, and (2) the characteristics of journalism in Jordan and obstacles facing it, particularly regarding freedom of expression and government control.

A. The Starting Point: Between the Public and Private Sectors

It would not be incorrect to say that political circumstances decide the form and substance of the institutions in the modern State of Jordan. This practically applies to the Jordanian press in general and to *Al-Rai* in particular.

The emergence of Jordanian journalism was closely linked to the creation of the political entity of the Emirate of Trans-Jordan on 11 April 1921. *Right Prevails* was the first newspaper in Jordan; it was produced at the camp of Prince Abdullah I in the city of Ma’an. After the introduction of the print press in 1923, *Al-Sharq Al-Arabi* was issued, at first as a weekly or bimonthly. Its name was changed in 1926 to *The Official Gazette of the Government of Trans-Jordan*. The name was changed again after independence to *The Official Gazette of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan* and it continues to be produced till the present.¹⁵

After the independence of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan on 25 May 1946, the following political party newspapers were issued: *Al-Rae’ed* by Amin Abu Al-Sha’ar which was the mouthpiece of the Jordanian People’s Party, and *Al-Jihad* (1947) and *Al-Nahdah* (1949), which were produced by the Arab Renaissance Party. After 1948, a number of Palestinian journalists moved with their newspapers to Jordan.¹⁶

During the era of pan-Arab nationalism, particularly the Nasserite stream that flooded the Arab street in the fifties and sixties,¹⁷ the government of Jordan, under the premiership of Wasfi Al-Tal, felt that the Jordanian press that came from Jerusalem, and which had its origins in the Palestinian press, was unable to face up to or even to reach a truce with the Nasserite spread, which relied on the radio to disseminate its propaganda. A new Press and Publications Law was promulgated in 1967 to replace the law of 1955, enabling the government to exercise effective control on the unruly or ineffective press.

14 Al-Mussa, Issam, 1998. *Development of the Jordanian Press 1920 – 1977*. Amman: Jordan Historic Committee Publications, pp. 79-143.

15 Al-Mussa, Issam, 1997, *A Presentation on Mass Communications*. Irbid, Jordan: Kittaneh Library , p. 261

16 Ibid, p. 265.

17 About Nasserite media see, Al-Shalabi, Jamal, 2001. *Mohammad H. Heikal Entre la Politique de Nasser et la Politique de l’Infatiah de Sadate: 1952 – 1981*. Paris : L’Harmattan, p. 222.

This law merits a pause because it will explain the reasons why *Al-Rai* was issued years later. The Act of 1967 caused the disappearance of newspapers that were scores of years old, the emergence of others that still exist today, and it permitted the government to impose itself as a partner in a newspaper or even to issue its own. This left a clear impact on the objectivity and professionalism of Jordanian journalism.

On 1 February 1967, Prime Minister Wasfi Al-Tal, then heading his fourth cabinet, enacted Press and Publications Law No. 16 as a temporary law, after dissolving the Lower House of Parliament. The Law stipulated professional and financial conditions for producing a newspaper, but these conditions were easy to meet. The most important article in the law was Article 71, which stated that: 'Upon the enactment of this law, all licenses to produce publications will be cancelled. Those interested in producing publications should apply for a license in accordance with the provisions of this law.'¹⁸

Thus, the Jordanian press entered new phase with four new dailies: *Al-Difa'a*, *Filastin*, *Al-Jihad* and *Al-Manar*, which were made to understand that they should merge into two: one in Amman and the other in Jerusalem. Paradoxically, the Minister of Information participated in the negotiations between newspaper owners and nominated the chief editors and editors. *Palestine* and *Al-Manar* merged into *Al-Dustour*, to be issued in Amman, while *Al-Difa'a* and *Al-Jihad* merged into *Al-Quds*, to be issued in Jerusalem. Many weeklies disappeared because they were denied a new license. The Government also appointed Ministry of Information staff on the editorial boards of the two new newspapers and dismissed many of their original editors.

Without delving excessively in the history of journalism in Jordan, it is important to highlight the major effect that the 1967 war (which erupted after four months of the enactment of the law) and the events of September 1970 had on the developments that followed. The war separated the Jordanian from the Palestinian press permanently, and fighting of 1970 convinced the government of the need to issue its own newspaper.¹⁹ *Al-Dustour* was the only daily that appeared in the three year 1967-1970 although *Al-Difa'a* also appeared very briefly. *Al-Dustour* toed the government's line, but without attacking the Palestinian resistance (PLO), while the latter was closer to the Palestinian organizations. This persuaded Prime Minister Wasfi Al-Tal to issue a newspaper that represented the viewpoint of the government.²⁰

The government issued its directive No 26 on 13 May 1971, establishing an intellectual institution and a governmental newspaper that is 'capable of understanding the political changes taking place.' This was the Jordan Press Foundation, whose first director-general was Amin Abu Al-Sha'r, and its first output was *Al-Rai*, came out as a result of the Prime Ministry's Decision of 18 May 1971. The first issue of *Al-Rai* appeared on 2 June 1971.²¹

It would appear that the objective of this step was to produce a 'semi-official' newspaper that represents the government's viewpoint as in many Arab countries. One factor that helped this idea to materialize was the availability of a new printing press, which Slaeem Al-Shareef, owner of *Al-Jihad*, had bought against an indemnity from the government after the 1967, in order to issue a newspaper in Amman instead of Jerusalem. When this journalist disappeared mysteriously in 1970, the government settled the debts, appropriated the printing press, and proceeded to issue its own newspaper.²²

Al-Rai became the second official newspaper in the history of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan after *Al-Sharq Al-Arabi*, which came out in 1923. Significantly, *Al-Rai* appeared on the newsstands 76

18 Sakejha, Bassem, 1998. 'Development of the Press and Journalism in Jordan' in Hani Hourani *et al.*, (eds.), *The Media and Press Freedom in Jordan*. Amman: Dar Al-Sindibad, p. 44.

19 Ibid., p. 45.

20 Ibid.

21 Hijazi, Abdullah *et al.*, 1995, *The Jordan Press Foundation: Jordan's Arab Message (1971-1995)*. Amman: Al-Rai Press, p. 11.

22 Interview with Nader Al-Hourani, Director-General of the Jordan Press Foundation, 1 January 2004.

days before its license came into force, but then again, what is the need for a license when the owner is the government?²³

Although the government adopted the Jordan Press Foundation from the start, *Al-Rai* did not live up to the expectations of the government. The political and professional outlooks that it represented topics did not prove to be marketable, and its circulation did not exceed a few hundred copies. The government needed a new approach, which was to pass the newspaper's ownership to people close to the government, who would maintain the same political line, but use their professional skills to make a success of the experiment. This approach almost worked.

The government sought to give the press to the private sector on condition that it should not deviate from the government line. The Foundation was transformed from a public shareholding establishment to a private shareholding establishment, a process that started in 1973 and was completed in 1975. Initially, ownership was transferred to the Arab National Union, the political organization formed by the government, through which the King tried to reunify Jordanian society by mobilizing all social forces from the East and West Banks of the River Jordan. The transfer took place by means of Temporary Law No. 45 (1973) that annulled Law No. 26, which established the Foundation and Temporary Law No. 5 for the year 1974, which reformed the Foundation as a private shareholding establishment, in which the government held 40% of the shares, while 60% were floated in the market. The process was completed on 1 September 1975, when the government's shares were sold.²⁴ On 2 January 1977, the Foundation was registered as a company bearing the No. 442, with a capital of JD 100,000. Juma'h Hammad was appointed Director-General.²⁵

The new owners of *Al-Rai* knew well that success does not come from representing the government's viewpoint. They acted on this knowledge, which raised circulation as well as the anger of the government, which reacted with reprimands and disruption, and even considered restoring full ownership by the state.²⁶

This status remained unchanged from 1977 to 1986 when the Foundation was transformed back to a public establishment, after the government decided to expand its holdings in dailies by transforming *Al-Rai* and *Al-Dustour* into public shareholding establishments. In accordance with this decision, newspapers ownership became as follows: 35% for the original owners, 25% for general trading, 15% for State funds, 20% for public companies and institutions, 5% for workers at the newspaper. The shares of the two companies were floated for public subscription²⁷ and *Al-Rai* was registered at the Companies Controller as Company No. 1/196 in 1986.

After a long labour, as Dr. Issam Al-Mousa the Professor of Communication and Journalism at Yarmouk University describes it, the final shape of modern Jordanian journalism began to emerge. *Al-Rai* and *Al-Dustour* represented the prevailing line, which proved its success over the years.²⁸ The standard of *Al-Rai* and *Al-Dustour* came to be the acceptable standard for Jordanian journalism, despite the state of instability caused by the transformation from public to private to public ownership.

23 Sakejha, Bassem, op. cit., p. 45.

24 The shares were bought by Jum'ah Hammad, Suleiman Arar, Mahmoud Al-Kayyed, Mohammad Al-Amad, and Raja Al-Issa.

25 Hijazi, Abdullah, op. cit., p. 12.

26 Sakejha, Bassem, op. cit., p. 46.

27 Al-Mussa, Issam, 1997, op. cit., p. 270.

28 Ibid. p. 271.

Table 1: Changes in the Status and Administration of *Al-Rai* under Different Governments

Date	The legal status	Chairman/ Board of directors	Director-General	Chief Editor	Prime Minister	General remarks
13/5/1971	Government newspaper	—	Amin Abo Al-Share		Wasfi Al-Tal	
2/6/1971	—	—	Nizar Rafi'ee	Nizar Rafi'ee	—	
12/5/1972	—	—	Milhem Al-Tal	M. Al-Tal	—	
1/2/1973	Party newspaper (Arab National Party)	—	Suleiman Arar	S. Arar	—	
1/9/1975	Private company	—	Jum'ah Hammad	S. Arar	Zeid Al-Rifa'e	
18/7/1976	—	—	—	Mahmoud Al-Kayyed	Mudar Badran	The Chief Editor was changed after Mr. Arar joined the government of Badran
1/1/1986	Public company	M. Al-Kayyed	Mohammad Al-Amad	—	Z. Al-Rifa'e	After the Foundation became company, a board of directors was formed to represent the shareholders, and M. Al-Kayyed was appointed Chairman.
24/8/1988	—	Khalil Al-Salem	Radi Al-Waqfi	Rakan Al-Majali	—	The boards of directors of newspapers were dissolved by order of the Economic Security Committee, and replaced by provisional administrations.
11/12/89	Public Company	M. Al-Kayyed	—	M. Al-Kayyed	Mudar Badran	The economy security committee annulled its decision, and decided to hold new elections within one month.
16/1/1990	—	—	Mohammad Al-Amad	—	—	The Company's General Assembly elected its second board of directors, with M. Al-Kayyed re-elected Chairman
1/4/1994	—	—	—	Suleiman Al-Qudah	Abdel salam Al-Majali	The board of directors elected Mr. M. Al-Kayyed Chairman
16/4/1998	—	Abdel salame Al-Trawnehe	—	—	—	
4/22/1999	—	Khalid Al-Karaki	—	—	Abdel Raouf Al-Rawabdeh	
22/7/2000	—	M. Al-Amad ()	—	—	Ali Abu Al-Ragheb	
17/12/2000	—	K Al-Karaki	—	—	—	
4/5/2001	—	Ahmed Abdel Fatah	—	—	—	
18/6/2001	—	—	Nader Al-Hourani	—	—	
2/7/2001	—	—	—	George Hawatmeh,	—	
13/4/2004	—	Khalid Al-Wazani	—	Abdul Wahab Al-Zgheilat	Faisal al-Fayez	

B. Clash between the Will of the Authorities and the Will for Freedom

Although the establishment of *Al-Rai* was originally sought by the Government in order to disseminate its viewpoint, and although the prevailing perception of *Al-Rai* is that of a government newspaper, a review of its historic and professional development would show that this perception is inaccurate, not to say fundamentally wrong.

The question then becomes: Did *Al-Rai*, which has sought since its inception to be ‘the newspaper of the state’ and not of the ‘government,’ succeed in doing so? Was it able to resist, or at least check the attempts by successive Jordanian governments to dominate it?

Successive Jordanian governments in the seventies and eighties of the last century used two methods to control the Jordan Press Foundation: One was disrupting it by suspending its publication and preventing it from fulfilling its role in creating awareness, criticism, and initiating dialogue; the other method consisted of taking authoritarian decisions to dominate the Foundation in one way or another.

Method 1: Punitive action

When *Al-Rai* failed to function first as a government tool, then as the mouthpiece of the Arab National Union (the would be state party), which made it necessary to transfer it to the public sector in 1975, *Al-Rai* in its new form faced obstacles and difficulties that almost caused its closure. It was suspended six times by the military governor (the Prime Minister),²⁹ which will be reviewed below in order to demonstrate the difficulties that *Al-Rai* had to overcome:

1. It was suspended by order of the Military Governor (Prime Minister) Zeid Al-Rifai on 11 June 1976 for ten days (extended to one month)³⁰ for publishing a statement about the events in Lebanon issued by the Association of Presidents of the Professional Associations of Jordan, in which they supported Arab efforts to stop the fighting in Lebanon.
2. It was suspended by order of the Military Governor (Prime Minister) Mudar Badran on 22 August 1977 for three days for publishing a news item about a proposed amendment to the Military Pension Law.³¹
3. It was suspended by order of the Military Governor (Prime Minister) Mudar Badran on 27 November 1978 for three days for publishing a news item about a salary increase for military and security personnel.³²
4. It was suspended for two weeks by order of the Military Governor (Prime Minister) Mudar Badran, based on a Cabinet decision on 5 August 1979 for publishing on 4 August a review of an Israeli book about Egyptian President Mohammad Al-Sadat’s visit to Israel. *Al-Rai* was reopened on 20 September 1979.³³
5. It was suspended by order of the Military Governor (Prime Minister) Mudar Badran on 27 May 1981 for three days for publishing news about Kuwaiti-Saudi proposals to dissolve the Council of Arab Economic Unity.³⁴
6. This suspension came after the expiry of the first suspension. When *Al-Rai* reopened on 30 May 1981, it was suspended again on 1 June 1981 for ten days by the order of Prime Minister Mudar Badran for publishing an article by the Chief Editor Mahmoud Al-Kayed entitled: ‘Why

29 Interview with columnist Tareq Massarweh of *Al-Rai*, 8 July 1982.

30 Obeidat, Shafiq, 2003. *Progress of the Jordanian Press 1920-2000*. Amman: Jordan Press Association, p. 155.

31 Obeidat, Shafiq, op. cit., p. 155.

32 Hijazi, Abdullah, op. cit., p. 90.

33 Ibid., p. 91

34 Ibid., p. 93.

did *Al-Rai* disappear?' in which he accused the Minister of Information of 'capriciousness, haughtiness, and hunting for mistakes.' He said that the Ministry behaves as if 'it has specialized in laying traps for journalism to undermine its efforts and the work of journalists.'³⁵ In addition, prominent columnist Tarek Masarweh asked many questions in his article entitled: 'On the margin of suspending *Al-Rai*,' including: 'Did *Al-Rai* deserve to be suspended for three days for a mistake in evaluating the news?' He added: 'If we were to apply this rule to other departments, institutions and ministries, how long would they stay suspended?' He then concluded: 'Punishing the press is punishing thought, and we do not think that there is anybody in this country who believes in summary punishment.'³⁶

These comments caused the newspaper to be suspended for ten more days on the grounds that they posed harm to Public Security and the Public Interest.³⁷

These examples show that the government was wary of the writings of *Al-Rai* due to its influence on public opinion. It should be noted that most of the offenses related to inter Arab news such as the Lebanese civil war, Jordanian-Kuwaiti-Saudi relations, or news about the Armed Forces and Public Security Directorate, albeit of an economic nature.

These examples also show us that *Al-Rai* did not succumb to these oppressive undemocratic methods. Instead it continued to voice its opinion without fear. This shows that there were some officials, such as chief editor Mahmoud Al-Kayed, who were willing to fulfil their function as 'the fourth power' in monitoring the government's work, exposing its transgressions, give chance to all community segments to speak their minds, and to expand the social and political dialogue and discussion whatever the cost may be.

Method 2: Financial Pressure

Although *Al-Rai* and *Al-Dustour* are loyalist newspapers, according to William Rou³⁸ this loyalty did not stop the government from suspending them and threatening to withdraw their licenses. This gives a clear picture of the oppressive nature of martial law and the Press and Publications Law of 1973³⁹ on the one hand, and of the durability and financial strength of the newspaper on the other. The government's inability to tame *Al-Rai* in the seventies caused it to search for another method to deal with the newspaper in the eighties. This consisted of taking executive decisions and compelling newspapers to obey them, particularly since the State of Emergency Law of 1967 was still in force and it gave the Prime Minister (Military Governor) full powers to take action he deemed to serve the public good, public security and national security. Some of the decisions taken against *Al-Rai*, reviewed below, had a negative impact on the newspaper's stability and impeded its progress.

1. Under the Zeid Al-Rifai government of 1985, Directives were issued to limit the publication of obituaries and condolences to the family of the deceased. They also limited the publication of congratulatory messages, particularly congratulations to public figures, except on nationalist and religious occasions.⁴⁰ This deprived *Al-Rai* of an important source of revenue.
2. In 1986, the government of Zeid Al-Rifai issued a decision that transformed the Jordan Press Foundation (*Al-Rai*) and the Jordan Press and Publications Co. (*Al-Dustour*) into public

35 Al-Mussa, Issam, 1997, op. cit., p. 271.

36 *Al-Rai*, 30 May 1981.

37 Alber, Pierre, op. cit., p. 25.

38 Row, William, 1989. *The Media and Politics in the Arab World*. [translated by M.Keilani] Amman: Jordan Book Center, p. 113.

39 Al-Mussa, Issam, 1998. op. cit., p. 150.

40 Obeidat, Shafiq, op. cit., p. 157.

foundations.⁴¹ It is believed that this decision was made in order to limit the independence that these newspapers enjoyed as private and economically strong institutions, a fact that highlights the influence Jordanian newspapers, the solidity of their economic base, and their financial independence, as they rely fully on advertisements and sales, not on the government assistance. It also shows their desire to report political and socio-economic events away from government domination. In addition, studies show that newspapers readership in Jordan in the eighties reached 650,000.⁴²

3. In early February 1987, the government of Zeid Al-Rifai raised the price of dailies from JD 0.05 to JD 0.075 (JD 0.71 = \$ 1) under pretext of the rise in the international price of print paper. It is noteworthy that Jordanian newspapers were not less than 20 pages long, and they sometimes reached 30. Daily distribution was around 200,000 with *Al-Rai* in the first place, *Al-Dustour* in second, and *Sawt Al-Sha'b* in third place.⁴³
4. In a positive development in 1988, Parliament agreed to amend Article 16 of the Press and Publications Temporary Law No. 2 of 1973, which lifted government immunity from prosecution for its decisions to revoke or withdraw the licenses of the press. This meant that the government could be prosecuted if it took such decision.⁴⁴

On 24 August 1988, the government, acting through the Economic Security Committee, which was formed by Martial Administration Directive No. 2 of 1967, and which granted the prime full authority as Military Governor, delivered a hard blow to the private ownership of newspapers. The Committee dissolved the elected boards of directors of the three newspapers, *Al-Rai*, *Al-Dustour* and *Sawt Al-Sha'b*, (in the case of *Al-Rai* this was represented by Chief Editor Mahmoud Al-Kayyed and General Manager Mohammad Al-Amad) and replaced them by provisional boards for two years. The committee also appointed new general managers and chief editors for the newspapers, and reduced the original shareholders' ownership to 5% of the total capital by selling their shares on 3 April 1989 to the Social Security Corporation (the government's investment arm) at 45.9% of the capital. By controlling the purse strings, the public sector effectively imposed its control on the newspapers.⁴⁵

Under the government of Mudar Badran, the Economic Security Committee reversed its decisions of 11 December 1989 and returned the old boards of directors to the three foundations, but the government did not divest its shares. On 10 December 1990, the Jordan Press Foundation's elected board appointed Mohammad Al-Amad as general manager of the foundation, and increased the foundation's capital to JD 2 million.⁴⁶

This last measure may be considered a natural outcome of process of democratization that started in 1989. This will be addressed in Chapter Two, which reviews the development of the Jordan Press Foundation during the era of democratization and its technological development under the information revolution brought about by 'globalization.'

VI. *Al-Rai* between Democracy and Technology

The dialectical relationship between political development (democratization) and technological development under the globalization, in one way or another, affected the development of the Jordanian press in general and Jordan Press Foundation in particular. These two elements (democracy and

41 Ibid.

42 *Al-Dustour* (Arabic daily newspaper), Amman, 13 May 1986.

43 Al-Mussa, Issam, 1998, op. cit., p. 152.

44 Interview with Mr. Nader Al-Hourani, Director-General of the Jordan Press Foundation, 1 January 2004.

45 Hijazi, Abdullah, op. cit., p. 12.

46 Ibid.

technology) formed the framework and the environment in which the press has worked since the eighties of the last century.

The eighties not only witnessed political developments, such as the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the collapse of Berlin Wall in 1989; it also witnessed the development of communications technology. This era brought about new technological and communications breakthroughs starting with personal computers (PCs) which came to be connected with other communication tools such as satellites, radio and television, ultimately leading to the creation of the worldwide web. It is vitally important to study the effect of these developments on political, economic, social and moral values, and hence their impact on existing regimes and institutions, as technological developments give rise to new institutions organized by new laws and traditions.⁴⁷ Technology and the resulting information revolution forced some Arab countries, including Jordan, to liberate the media. This became clear when Jordan's press and publications censor discarded his scissors and announced that foreign publications could go directly from the airport to the newsstand. This decision was taken when the censor realized that any news item censored would be accessible to the population through the internet satellite stations such as *Al-Jazirah*.⁴⁸

In the following pages, the study will first address the development of the Jordan Press Foundation under democracy, and then the effect of technological developments on its performance.

A. Development of the Press under Democracy

It would be fair to say that Jordan was able to absorb quickly and effectively the fruits of the communications revolution thanks to the political changes that happened in 1989. The process of democratization changed public and official perceptions of the way to deal with this revolution and its tools. Jordanian publishers also availed themselves of these opportunities. Most Jordanian newspapers now post electronic editions that are read by hundreds of thousands of people all over the world every day.⁴⁹

The Jordan Press Foundation and *Al-Rai* were not far from this new situation that prevails in Jordan.⁵⁰ The Foundation continues to work to play an effective role in the community and environment by introducing new technological products in its work, such as electronic phototypesetting, colour printing, and modern colour separation equipment. In addition, the Foundation has participated with others in the information revolution through two electronic newspapers on the web, particularly during the phase of democratization that started in the early nineties of the last century. This in the concept known as: 'movement by the political regime to adopting the following measures: elected deputies, free and honest election, the right to occupy public positions, access to authority, freedom of expression, availability of information that is supported legally and through institutional independence.'⁵¹

It should be noted that this definition paid clear attention to 'freedom of expression' and 'availability of information,' which indicates the importance of press freedom as an indicator of democratic transformation. Therefore, the study will seek to answer the fundamental question: 'What

47 Snow, May, op. cit., p. 23.

48 Al-Mussa, Issam, 2002. 'The Media of Auto-Censorship: The Jordanian Media and the Requirements of the Transition to Democracy,' *Al-Dirasat Al-I'lamiyah (Media Studies)*, The Arab Regional Center for Media Studies for Population, Development, and the Environment, Cairo, 108, July-September, p. 14.

49 Al-Sharif, Osama, 1998. 'The Technological Revolution in Jordan,' in H. Hourani *et al.*, (eds.), *The Media and Press Freedom in Jordan*. Al-Amman: Dar Al-Sindibad, p. 44.

50 Al-Shalabi, Jamal, and Hayjneeh, Adnan, 2005. *The Effects of Globalization on the Information Technology and Educational Sector in the Reign of King Abdullah II*. New York: Nova Publisher, (forthcoming).

51 Solingen, Etel, 1996, 'Quandaries of Peace,' *Journal of Democracy*, 7(3), p. 140. Also see Jagger, Keith and Gurr, Ted, 1995. 'Tracking Democracy's Third Wave with the Polity III Date', *Journal of Peace Research*, 32 (4), p. 474.

are the general characteristics of journalism in the Jordanian press in general and in the Jordan Press Foundation—*Al-Rai* in particular under the democratic transformation?

This question could only be answered by looking at two integrated dimensions: the legal framework and professional behaviour, particularly because ‘what distinguishes one type of press from another is the conditions in which all aspects of freedom of thought are practiced, from the conception of this freedom until its expression.’⁵²

1. The Legal Framework

The Jordanian Constitution of 1952, the Press and Publications Law of 1933, the Jordan Press Association Law of 1983, and the Penal Code of 1960 are the principal laws that govern the press in Jordan, including *Al-Rai* in the context of the democratic transformation.⁵³ *Al-Rai* interacted with democratization as did other Jordanian newspapers and magazines, which increased from 8 in 1988 to 48 in 1996.⁵⁴ This is considered to be a direct reflection on the Press and Publications Law of 1993,⁵⁵ which is considered to have been the most flexible and developed. It reasserted the provision of Article 3 of the 1952 Constitution, that: ‘the press and printing are free.’ Article (4) of the Constitution reaffirmed press freedom by stating that: ‘The press practices its work in freedom to provide news, information and commentaries and contribute to the dissemination of ideas, culture and science within the law.’⁵⁶ Therefore, the role of *Al-Rai*, as defined by its former chief editor Suleiman Al-Qudah, consists of two objectives:

A philosophical outlook that can be summarized in the following points:

- a. Participating in the political development of Jordanian society.
- b. Conveying citizens’ opinions and concerns to decision-making circles.
- c. Conveying the opinions of officials and the decision-makers to the citizens.
- d. Highlighting national issues.
- e. Benefiting from democracy

This means that, throughout its history, *Al-Rai* pushed for the adoption of democratic practices. It practiced democracy under martial law, for which it suspended six times and had its license drawn once.

Communications and media functions, which consist of two aspects:

- a. Informing Jordanian and Arab citizens about regional and international political issues.
- b. Providing immediate coverage of events through a network of correspondents in important capitals all over the world (Washington, Paris, London, etc).⁵⁷

It would appear from the above that the Jordanian press, with *Al-Rai* as an example, work to realize the theory that ‘citizens have the right to know’ and the theory of ‘social responsibility by the media’⁵⁸ which, according to many Arab thinkers, is the more applicable in the Arab World and Third World countries in general, because the governments of these countries, due to their powers, are the agencies that have the power to protect against tyranny by some individuals, and to protect individuals from the tyranny of society. The media, including the press in the Arab World and the Third World bear

52 Balle, Francis, op. cit., p. 189.

53 Al-Shalabi, Jamal, 2000, op. cit., p. 40.

54 Ibid., p. 55.

55 Since the Jordanian Constitution was promulgated in 1952, a number of legislations were enacted to regulate journalism. These were the Press and Publications Laws of 1953, 1955, 1967, 1973, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2000, and 2001. The most liberal of these laws were those of 1955 and 1993. See Al-Mussa, Issam, 1998, op. cit., p. 168.

56 Al-Qudah, Ahmad, 1998. *The Press and Publications Department: Seventy Years of Giving 1927-1997*. Amman: Department of Press and Publications Department Publications, p. 201.

57 Interview with Suleiman Al-Qudah, former Chief Editor of *Al-Rai*, 20 February 2004.

58 Balle, Francis, op. cit., p. 190.

responsibility of achieving national goals, the most important of which are democracy, stability and respect for human rights. This does not mean that the state may control the media whether they are owned by the state, individuals or groups.⁵⁹

In spite of the democratic transformation that the Jordanian press has witnessed since 1989, the residue of the undemocratic past still lives in state institutions. It manifests itself in the tendency to excessive secrecy in the state apparatus, which is legislated in the State Secrets and Classified Documents Act that classifies all documents issued by any ministry in four categories of secrecy: normal, limited circulation, secret and top secret.⁶⁰ Normal documents, which have the lowest order of secrecy, cannot be given to a person who is not concerned with their content. Former Chief Editor of the *Jordan Times*, the late Abdullah Hasanat clarified the point by saying: 'In Jordan, nobody lower in rank than a minister is allowed to disclose information about the normal activities of the government, and each minister issues strict instructions to his staff not to disclose any information to journalists.'⁶¹

In order to avoid making mistakes, Jordanian newspapers, according to *Al-Rai's* former Chief Editor Al-Qudah by the traditional means in two steps:

1. Collecting information from journalists, correspondences, news agencies, etc.
2. Re-writing and rewording news. This is done in three steps: selecting news, editing them, and publishing them.⁶² According to Al-Qudah:

News should be taken as facts devoid of personal impressions. These facts are then mixed with the personal opinions of the editor because these opinions are a fundamental element in writing and selecting the news. We are not dealing with equations of physics but with social and human equations and the personal opinion could not be ruled out when selecting the news. In addition, when selecting and writing the news it is important to consider the policy of the state, the newspaper's readers, the time factor, the importance of the news, and steering clear of the personal interests of the journalist.⁶³

The process followed in *Al-Rai* that Al-Qudah describes may appear strange and not in the nest professional standards of journalism; but on reading the book *La Presse* by Pierre Albert one finds a view similar to that of Al-Qudah, which applies methods of work in the west as well as in the third world. Pierre Albert says:

the journalist cannot be objective not only because the concept of the truth is relative, but also because selecting the news, explaining events, prioritizing articles, the lack of objectivity in journalists' accounts, and the complexity of events preclude any hope of finding an accurate report published by the press.⁶⁴

2. Professional Behaviour.

During the process of democratization, a remarkable development happened in the nature of subjects treated by the Jordanian press. The Press and Publications Law 1993 for all its weaknesses, succeeded in 'putting an end to direct government censorship on the press and turning it into auto-censorship,' according to *Al-Rai's* General Manager Nadir Al-Hourani. 'The authorities in charge are no longer

59 Basyouni, Ibrahim Hamadah, 1993, *The Role of the Media in Decision Making in the Arab World*. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, p. 172 .

60 Essoulami, Said, 1994, 'Jordan: Democratization without Democracy', *Press Freedom Article 19*. London: 22 March, p. 14.

61 Ibid., p. 12.

62 Interview with Suleiman Al-Qudah, op. cit.

63 Ibid.

64 Alber, Pierre, op. cit., p. 22.

able to close down newspapers or punish journalists for publishing a certain article. All they can do is refer the violation to the judiciary.’⁶⁵

For instance, before democratization, any talk about corruption was considered defamation of the country, and its investment climate, and shaking public confidence. After democratization, newspapers gained a margin of freedom to publish news and commentary about corruption, although, the dailies, *Al-Rai*, *Dustour* and *Arab Al Yawm* only write about this subject in general terms, not through investigating specific issues or naming certain departments, agencies, or persons because these newspapers do not have the ability to conduct extensive or to acquire evidence on the one hand, and on the other due to the social pressure. By contrast, weeklies and party newspapers are keener to publish reports on corruption, even if they do not achieve tangible results.⁶⁶

To be sure, the Jordanian press bears responsibility for certain shortcomings in its coverage of very important issues. Jordanian dailies, including *Al-Rai*, are content to seek information from foreign news agencies and media, even over issues related to important domestic events. A good example is that, during the signature of the Jordanian-Israeli Peace Treaty at Wadi Araba in 1994, the Jordanian press had only 12 reporters, compared with 200 Israeli reporters.⁶⁷

In an attempt to justify the inability of the local press to follow up on news, journalists claim that Jordanian officials have double standards in dealing with local and foreign reporters. Foreign reporters have a better chance than local journalists to gain access to information and to meet with Jordanian officials. In addition, Jordanian officials use two different languages: one to address public opinion through the foreign media, and another when they talk through local media. This explains why the government frequently bans foreign publications that attribute certain statements to Jordanian officials.⁶⁸

In a recent seminar held in 2004 by Al-Rai Studies and Information Center, Chief Editor of weekly *Al-Hadath* Nidal Mansour commented on these double standards by saying: ‘as a journalist, you may accompany HM the King on an official visit, and on the following day you might be showered with cudgels.’⁶⁹

The other development that took place in the Jordanian press during democratization, which also reflected on *Al-Rai*, was the representation of the political opposition in the press. In this regard, the representation of the opposite opinion is still weak in the Jordanian newspapers in spite of the freedom that the press enjoys to publish different opinions, information and articles. Expressing the opposition’s opinion is done in the dailies in the form of communiqués from opposition parties on certain issues and in the form of articles and commentaries by writers who hold an outlook opposite to that of the government.

In a poll conducted by former chief editor of *Al-Dustour* Dr. Nabil Al-Sharif on *Al-Dustour* and *Al-Rai* in the period from 26 July 1994 to 1 September 1994 on attitudes towards the peace process, it was found that *Al-Rai* published 60 commentaries in favour of the peace process and five against, while *Al-Dustour* published 71 commentaries in favour of the peace process and 20 against. Therefore, the space enjoyed by the opposition in the dailies is still limited compared to weeklies and political party newspapers that enjoy financial independence. These publications can only raise their circulation by publishing what the dailies cannot.⁷⁰

65 Interview with Mr. Nader Al-Hourani, Director-General of the Jordan Press Foundation, 1 January 2004.

66 Al-Shalabi, Jamal, 2000, op. cit., p. 57.

67 Nematt, Slamah, 1995. ‘The Double Standards in Dealing With Local and International Media, the Experience of Jordan in the Democratic Era’, in G. Hawatmeh (ed.), *The Role of the Media in a Democracy: The Case of Jordan*. Amman: Jordan University Centre for Strategic Studies, p. 98.

68 Nematt, Slamah, op. cit., p. 99.

69 *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 2004. Weekly Report of Jordan, London, 25 October, p. 8.

70 Al-Sharif, Nabil, ‘The Role of the Opposition in the Print Press,’ in G. Hawatmeh, op. cit., pp. 18-20.

In brief, *Al-Rai*, along with other Jordanian newspapers, had to practice its profession in the context of a legal framework that was flexible at times, and rigid at others. This, in addition to working methods that fluctuate in their progressiveness, led to instability and little attention to creativity in journalism.

In spite of these factors that could frustrate any newspaper, the Jordan Press Foundation was able to survive and to achieve a reasonable level of professionalism at the local and Arab levels, and to fulfil its objectives of providing information and entertainment, satisfying psychological needs, and enhancing social integration.⁷¹ This could be attributed to the following factors:

1. *The professional factor.* Readers like diversity of news, which is provided by *Al-Rai* through its weekly supplements on sports (Saturdays), education (Fridays), and science and technology (also on Saturdays). After Mr. Abdul Wahab Al-Zgheilat became the chief editor in 2004, a supplement on youth was introduced on Thursdays and another on the provinces on Tuesdays. These supplements are 8-12 pages long. In addition, certain pages are devoted to the environment, family, women, religion, sports, etc. which makes the newspaper 60-80 pages long. On 27 November 1995, *Al-Rai* with 14 other Arab newspapers signed in Granada, Spain the first Arab cultural newspaper agreement with the UNESCO to issue a 'book in a newspaper' supplement, which would consist of Arabic texts of value in a supplement distributed with the newspaper. The books have been published on a monthly basis since 1997. In the same context, *Al-Rai* publishes on a monthly basis a translation from French of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.⁷²

In addition, *Al-Rai* attracts a number of prominent Jordanian daily columnists such as Fahd Al-Fanek, Tarek Masarweh, Ibrahim Al-Ajlouni, and others, as well as commentators who wrote on a weekly basis or on national and religious occasions, such as Khaled Mahadeen, Salah Jarrar, Abdul Raheem Malhas, etc. Many of those writers held important cultural or political positions in Jordan.

A number of *Al-Rai* writers, write their columns and articles in a political literary cultural form, where they use symbolism in their writings to cheat the censor and draw close to the forbidden, particularly at times of crisis, or to avoid violating the Press and Publications Law. When Dr. Khalid Al-Karaki was chairman, *Al-Rai* shined as he adopted a policy of linking cultural and political subjects, and he gave more opportunities to the opposition to express itself. He also opened *Al-Rai's* pages to writers such as Ma'en Bashour of Lebanon, Abdullah Imam of Egypt, Abdul Aziz Maqaleh of Yemen, Mamdouh Adwan of Syria, Abdullah Hourani of Palestine, as well as a number of Iraqis and others. After his term came to an end in 2001, those writers stopped their contributions to *Al-Rai*.

It is worth noting, that *Al-Rai* Journalist are constant participants in many political and economic programs on the Jordan TV as well as other Arab satellite TV such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabia. Many names comes like Salh AlGalab, Fahad Alfank, Yasser Abu Hlaha, Majeed Asfor, and many others.

Since 2001, i.e. under Chief Editor George Hawatmeh, *Al-Rai* started to present American policy and its goals in the Middle East through articles directly translated from the American press, with little room left for anti-American views and Jordanian and Arab opinions. After the George Hawatmeh resigned under circumstances that are still not clear, Chief Editor Abdul Wahab Al-Zgheilat (close to the official departments) recalled Jordanian and Arab writers whom *Al-Rai* had alienated.

2. *Financial Factor.* The Jordan Press Foundation is considered the most financially successful press foundation in Jordan. It started with a limited capital in 1971, which reached JD 1 million in 1986, and jumped to around 4.5 million now.⁷³ But the question becomes: What is the reason of this increase in its capital?

71 Alber, Pierre, op. cit., p. 22.

72 Interview with Nader Al-Hourani, Director-General of the Jordan Press Foundation, 1 January 2004.

73 See *Jordan Press Foundation 18th Annual Report*, 2003, Amman: Al-Rai Press, p. 32 .

Advertising revenue is the most important source of income for *Al-Rai*. By distributing around 70,000-90,000 copies a day, the newspaper gained the loyalty and confidence of many advertisers. In addition, while other dailies tend to be identical, drawing their news from Petra (the Jordan News Agency), *Al-Rai* presents much stronger analytical items.

The 2003 annual financial report shows the important role of advertising on *Al-Rai*'s financial stability. The total revenues amounted to JD 15,499,855 which consists of:

Revenue from advertising, <i>Jordan Times</i> and <i>Hatem Magazine</i>	69.1%
Sales of <i>Al-Rai</i> , <i>Jordan Times</i> and <i>Hatem Magazine</i>	15.8%
Revenues of the commercial print press	6.9%
Expenses went mainly to salaries and remunerations	43%
Paper and printing requirements	33%
The Studies and Information Center	1.1% ⁷⁴

In brief, it seems that the democratic transformation in Jordan gave more room of freedom to *Al-Rai*. But the freedom required to criticize the government's performance or reporting mistakes and transgressions are far from *Al-Rai*'s objectives. *Al-Rai* rarely discloses a government act or decision, which explains why *Al-Rai* did not carry the reports published by Petra, the official news agency, about the Social Security Corporation.⁷⁵

In spite of the rapid privatization of government institutions such as Jordan telecom, Arab Potash Company, and the Phosphate Mines Company, the Jordan Press Foundation is going the opposite way. In this case, the government ruled that the funds of the Social Security Corporation belong to the people not the government, so there is no need for privatization. This means that government (which has the majority of the shares of *Al-Rai*: it is about 55% of the shares, it is include in the text of the paper) will continue to dominate the policy of this newspaper and to stop any opposition to it or to its decisions on domestic issues such as tax increase, price rises, or regarding foreign policies, in particular, the Palestinian and Iraqi issues.

B. Al-Rai and Technology

It would be impossible to discuss the technological development of *Al-Rai* without considering the commercial prints. It has been said that the Jordan Press Foundation consists of five productive units most of which depend on modern technology. These units are:

1. *Al-Rai* daily newspaper, which was established in 1971.
2. Al-Rai Commercial Prints. They started their activities in 1971 using the offset system to print *Al-Rai* and school text books on roll paper.
3. The *Jordan Times*, established in 1975 as the first Jordanian daily in English. The first edition came out on 26 October 1975. It is issued daily except on Saturdays. It is printed by Al-Rai Commercial Prints. It is about 8-16 pages in addition to a supplement on Thursdays. About 12000 copies are distributed, 9000 in the Kingdom, 3000 abroad, in addition to one thousand subscription.
4. *Hatem* bimonthly magazine was established during the time of Chairman Abdul Salam Al-Tarawneh. It is a specialized magazine for 6-16 year old children, and as such it is sold at a

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁵ *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 2004. Weekly Report of Jordan, London, 25 October, p. 8.

symbolic price. It carries short stories, drawings, poetry and contests. The first edition was issued in November 1998.

5. Al-Rai Studies and Information Center was established in 1999 during the time of Chairman Dr. Khalid Al-Karaki. It aims at monitoring changes in world, researches and preparing studies and reports on the Arab World and Jordan, as well as databases and electronic archiving. The centre consists of 5 independent units, including the information unit.⁷⁶

With all these different units, *Al-Rai* was of the first Jordanian newspaper to use modern technology. It was the first to adopt modern photography printing (offset) upon its establishment in 1971, which was the most modern printing system in the world. The following is a brief chronology of the introduction of modern technology to *Al-Rai*.

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1971 | <i>Al-Rai</i> used a print capable of processing 16 pages in black and white. |
| 1984 | it used a print capable of processing 32 pages in black and white and four pages in colour. |
| 1993 | it introduced prints capable of processing 64 pages and eight pages in colour. |

At present it uses computer operated Roland Man Uniset print that processes 64 pages in colour at a speed of 60,000 copies per hour. It is equipped with electronic systems to fill the toner and an automatic paper drum.⁷⁷

Al-Rai uses computers in its administrative and journalistic activities. It established the electronic newspaper in April 1996, introduced the electronic version of the *Jordan Times* in October 1996, and it ranked first amongst all Arab dailies in electronic readership in 1999,⁷⁸ which indicates the success of the electronic newspaper at *Al-Rai* Newspaper.

But the question then becomes: Are the attempts of the traditional media, including *Al-Rai*, to have modern equipment are enough to classify them as modern and effective media?

This question seems hard to answer. Most people in the Arab World including Jordan acknowledge that possessing technology is not a substitute for correct information.⁷⁹ Time is needed to assess the consistency between technology and the quality of information, but it is fair to say that the technical development of the media was not sudden and abrupt as some observers believe, because the process of development of *Al-Rai* was continuous since its establishment in 1971. Regardless of the political situation, or its oscillation between the public and private sectors, technological development continued irrespective of the democratic transformation in 1989 or the information revolution.

The above notwithstanding, can the press survive on technology alone, or does the press need to be nourished by freedom and information that leads to the truth, such as it is, away from the authorities and their domination?

This question was answered by Dr. Issam Al-Moussa of Yarmouk University in his work about the relation between technology and the press, which suggests that:

Governments, including that of Jordan, responded to the call of technology and the information revolution by easing their tight grip on freedom of expression.' He goes on to ask: 'Was this a temporary retreat for the governments to catch their breath and absorb the shock of modern technology before updating their legislation to restore their old methods of control in a more

76 See *Jordan Press Foundation 18th Annual Report*, 2003, Amman: Al-Rai Press, p. 11-15.

77 Hijazi, Abdullah, op. cit., p. 17.

78 The addresses of the sites are: www.jordantimes.com, and www.alrai.com

79 On the state of communications technology and the media in the Arab world see Al-Lammal, Rassem, 1991. *Communications and the Media in the Arab World*. Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, p. 258.

intelligent manner?' He concludes that this explains four Press and Publications laws were enacted in Jordan in a period of 6 years (1993-1999).⁸⁰

In fact, these laws were followed by two others, the Press and Publications Law OF 2000, and the Press and Publications Law of 2001.

VII. Conclusions

The study reviewed the development of Jordan Press Foundation since its establishment in 1971 until 2004. It is a typical model of the development of press institutions in the Third World in general and in the Arab World in particular. It enjoys many the characteristics of advanced press institutions in Europe and America, such as budget growth generated from advertising and sales, which totalled 16 million Jordanian Dinars in 2003. In 2003, *Al-Rai* had 501 employees, of whom 156 were journalists.⁸¹ It uses the Internet, satellite communications, mobile phones, etc in developing its stories.

Based on the criteria established by Samuel Huntington for measuring the development and the effectiveness of institutions, such as stability, adaptability, complexity, independence and coherence, we can conclude the following on the development of this press foundation:

A. Stability

The development of the press in Jordan is linked to democratic or non-democratic political developments in the country. It is a product of the government that was transferred from the public sector to the private sector and back at the discretion of the government. For instance, since its establishment in 1971, *Al-Rai* had 7 chief editors and 6 general managers. Since its transformation into a public company in 1986, it had 6 chairmen, the most recent of whom was Dr. Khalid Al-Wazani. These chairmen were appointed by the government or with its consent, even during the democratic transformation. Occupying these positions happens suddenly and without clear criteria for the selection of the candidate.

Therefore, Jordan Press Foundation appears to be the 'newspaper of the government' and not the 'newspaper of the state' as the Late King Hussein and King Abdullah II desired. It was the successive governments (25 governments since 1971)⁸² who changed the chief editors and chairmen when they took office. For instance, when Ali Abul Ragheb's government took over, George Hawatmeh was appointed chief editor, only to be replaced by Abdul Wahab Al-Zgheilat by the government of Faisal Al-Fayez.⁸³ Lamees Andoni an international journalist who started her career at the Jordan Press Foundation, referred to this issue in a seminar organized by the Information and Studies Center a few hours after King Abdullah had criticized to the official media for being too scared to be effective 'Once Ali Abu Al-Ragheb's term ended, everybody speculated about the fate of chief editor George Hawatmeh, whether he would stay on or leave with his friend Abu Al-Ragheb,' Andoni said. She concluded: 'Everybody knows that *Al-Rai*'s chief editor has no control, not even over himself.'⁸⁴

80 Al-Mussa, Issam, 'The Media of Auto-Censorship: The Jordanian Media and the Requirements of the Transition to Democracy,' op. cit., p. 14

81 See: *Jordan Press Foundation 18th Annual Report*, 2003, Amman, Al-Rai Press, p. 16

82 Press and Publications Department, 2003. *Jordanian Documents; Ministries of Jordan 1921-2003*, pp. 102-185

83 *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 2004. Weekly Report of Jordan, London, 25 October, p. 8.

84 Andoni was dismissed by George Hawatmeh for her candor, but her prophecy proved correct as George Hawatmeh lost his position immediately when Faisal Al-Fayez was appointed Prime Minister.

B. Adaptability

The Jordan Press Foundation was able to adapt to all political and economic changes and tough conditions. It adapted to internal and external changes by changing persons and positions. For instance, George Hawatmeh accused of being close to American circles was appointed just after the third Gulf War (against Iraq) which helped to explain American policy in the Middle East. Later, when the King called in a speech for reactivating Arab relations Hawatmeh was replaced by Abdul Wahab Zgheilat who is close of the government and has a local outlook. The predecessor of these two, Khalid Al-Karaki was considered part of the Arab nationalist stream (Iraqi Ba'ath) although had been Chief of the Royal Court during the Second Gulf War.

Al-Rai also adapted successfully to advances in communications and information technology by expanding the scope of its activities; it established the 'electronic press' in 1996, which raised its monthly readership to 20 million during the events of September 2001. Later it settled at 13 million readers, a fact that qualified *Al-Rai* to win the Electronic Arab Press prize.⁸⁵ It should be emphasized that it would be impossible to separate the links between electronic information and wire communications⁸⁶ and that the relation between the print press and electronic media, old and new, is one of complementarity not competition.⁸⁷

C. Complexity

Jordan Press Foundation consists of 5 distinct units with each one playing a very important role in supporting the newspaper. There is also a complex division of roles within the Foundation, particularly in *Al-Rai*, the Foundation's backbone, such as public relations, management, commercial , etc.

D. Financial Independence

It is clear that changes in the legal and professional status of this Foundation had a destabilizing effect in spite of its capital growth, which reached around JD 16 million in 2003. The capital growth and profits are attributed to many factors such as government support, advertising, and sales. *Al-Rai's* shares in the Amman Stock Exchange are among the highest in the media industry, at 19 JD, as compared to those of *Al-Dustour* at JD 5. This allowed *Al-Rai* to maintain a leading position among Jordanian newspapers, and even Arab newspapers.

E. Coherence

In Jordanian society, which is Arab, traditional and dominated by the political authorities, it would be difficult to measure the degree of coherence in the Foundation or among its staff. No study has been conducted to ascertain the opinion of its 501 workers. Nevertheless, we can safely state that there are rival currents vying for power behind the scenes, which becomes obvious when there are changes in top management. For instance, political columnist Mohammad Kharoub was frozen by Hawatmeh, but he returned in force when Zgheilat took office. The same happened to Samir Al-Hiyari who shot up to the position of the assistant chief editor under Hawatmeh. It would be difficult to explain why this or that person was removed or frozen by one chief editor, and then promoted by another.

In fact, some journalists have power over others, particularly when they are backed by the security agencies. Lamees Andoni referred to this by saying: 'I think that many local editors and journalists,

85 See: *Jordan Press Foundation 18th Annual Report*, 2003, Amman, Al-Rai Press, p. 12.

86 Breton, Philippe and Proulx, Serge, 1990. *L'Explosion de la communication: la naissance d'une nouvelle idéologie*. Paris : La Découverte, p. 327.

87 Alber, Pierre, op. cit., p. 22.

either out of fear or in order to earn their living, report to the security agencies, mostly against their colleagues.’ She stressed that:

the role of security agencies is to protect national security and not to contact individual journalists to ensure that their loyalties are to a person and not to the homeland or agency.’ She concluded: ‘A telephone call made by a small official, probably with a personal agenda, is sufficient to control what is published in *Al-Rai*.’ Adding her belief that ‘such interference is not practiced by top-officials.’⁸⁸

The opinions expressed by Andoni are not new, but the expression of a widespread conviction in Jordanian press circles in general, and in *Al-Rai* in particular. Prominent columnist Fahd Al-Fanek expresses the same feeling in his book *Press and Responsible Freedom*, published by the Jordan Press Foundation: ‘I am beholden to *Al-Rai*, not the reverse. It did not fail me when the powerful were angry with me and sought to stop me from writing by means of a telephone call.’⁸⁹

In short, to understand the Jordanian press in particular, and the Arab press or even the press of the Third World in general, we must understand the policy of the ruling regime by understanding its means of self legitimization, even in the context of globalization. This means going back to the traditional articles of German philosopher Max Weber about ‘Traditional legitimacy, charisma, and rational legitimacy’⁹⁰ to categorize our press and policies irrespective of technological developments and the information and communications revolution, which we can buy and consume at our discretion and at the time of our choosing.

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88 *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, 2004. Weekly Report of Jordan, London, 25 October, p. 8.

89 Al-Fanek, Fahd, 1997. *The Press and Responsible Journalism*. Amman: Jordan Press Foundation, p. 10.

90 Shwartzenberg, Roger-Gérard, 1988. *Sociologie Politique*. Paris: Monchrestien, p. 248.

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